



# IT'S OK TO ASK: A Community-Based Suicide Prevention Model

**Colleen Nester, LCSW-C**  
Youth & Family Support Services Unit Supervisor

**Leah Bulka, LMSW**  
Behavioral Health Navigator & Youth Suicide Prevention Coordinator



**Promote. Preserve. Protect.**

[hchealth.org](http://hchealth.org)



# OBJECTIVES

---

- Discuss the background and significance for the Howard County Youth Suicide Prevention Plan (YSPP)
- Provide an overview of the YSPP and the Sources of Strength peer leadership program
- Provide a summary of the pilot year of the Howard County community-based Sources of Strength program
- Hear from a panel of Sources of Strength youth and adult participants

# THE PROBLEM

---

- Over the last decade the number of suicide deaths among youth ages 10-19 has increased by 54%.
- According to 2017 data for Maryland, suicide ranked as the second leading cause of death for youth ages 10-14 and as the third leading cause of death for individuals ages 15-24.
- Suicide was the **leading cause** of death for youth ages 15-19 in Howard County between 2014-2018.

**SUICIDE IS PREVENTABLE!**

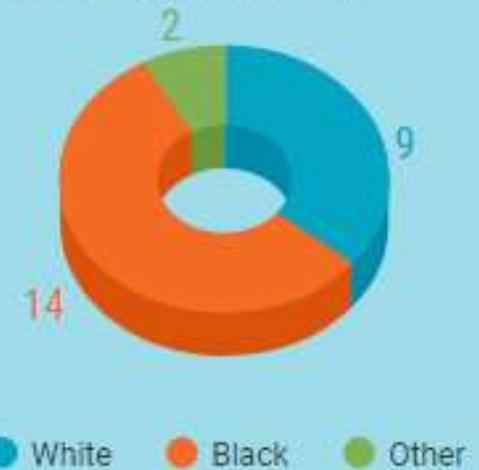
*Data Source: Maryland Department of Health, Maryland Vital Statistics Annual Reports, 2008-2018*

# SUICIDE DEATHS IN ADOLESCENTS, HOWARD COUNTY, 2009-2018

Deaths Among Adolescents Ages 10-19 Years by Cause of Death, Howard County



Suicide Deaths by Race, Ages 10-19 Howard County, 2009-2018



Suicide deaths in 10-year period  
**56% black youth**  
 compared to 21% of the population

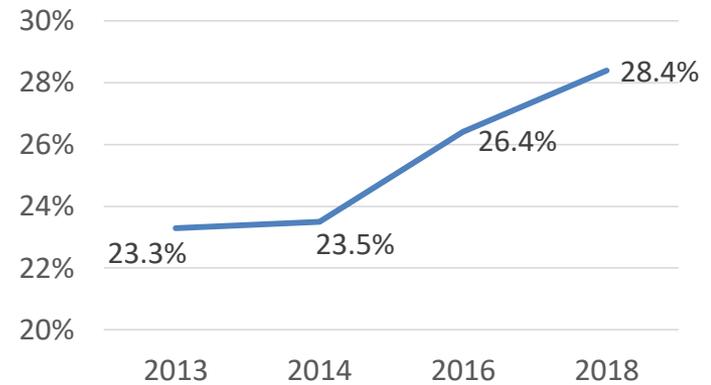
Data Source: 2018 Youth Behavior Risk Survey, CDC

# STUDENT SELF-REPORT DATA TREND: HOPELESSNESS

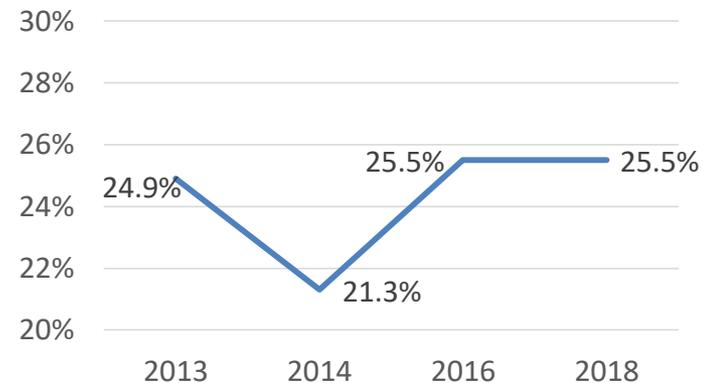
- Percent of students who felt sad or hopeless for 2 weeks or more in past year:
  - Increased from 2013 to 2018 for High School Students\*
  - Increased from 2013 to 2018 for Middle School Students\*

\*Based on trend analysis using a logistic regression model controlling for sex, race/ethnicity, and grade,  $p < 0.05$ .

## High School Students



## Middle School Students



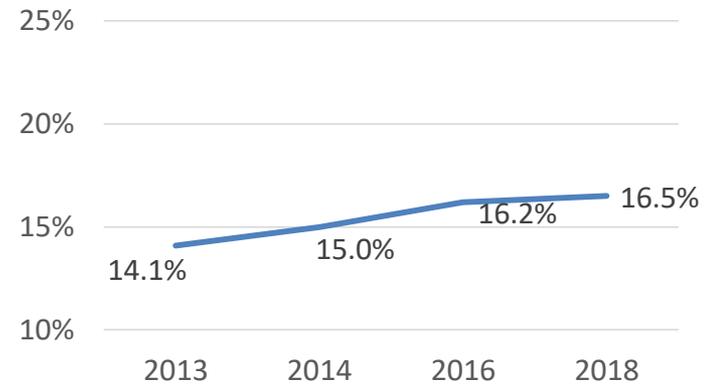
Data Source: 2018 Youth Behavior Risk Survey, CDC

# STUDENT SELF-REPORT DATA TREND: CONSIDERED SUICIDE

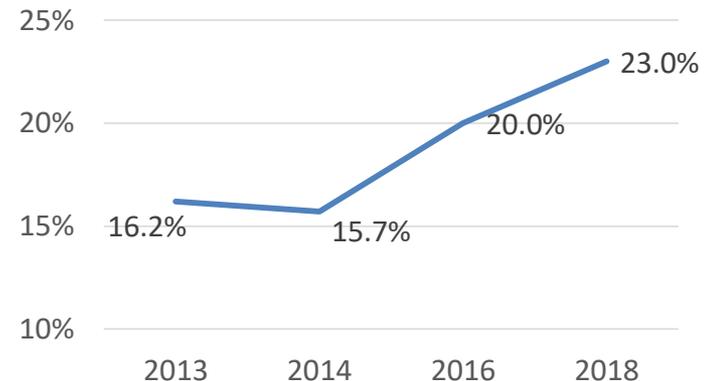
- Percent of students who ever seriously considered suicide:
  - Increased from 2013 to 2018 for High School Students\*
  - Increased from 2013 to 2018 for Middle School Students\*

\*Based on trend analysis using a logistic regression model controlling for sex, race/ethnicity, and grade,  $p < 0.05$ .

## High School Students



## Middle School Students



Data Source: 2018 Youth Behavior Risk Survey, CDC

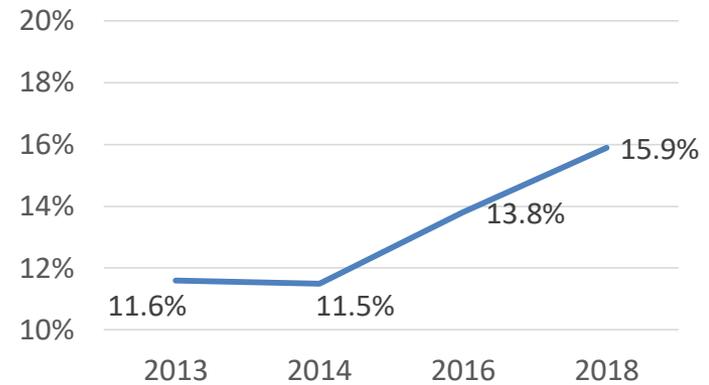
# STUDENT SELF-REPORT DATA TREND: MADE A SUICIDE PLAN

- Percent of students who made a suicide plan in the past year:
  - Increased from 2013 to 2018 for High School Students\*
  - Increased from 2016 to 2018 for Middle School Students\*†

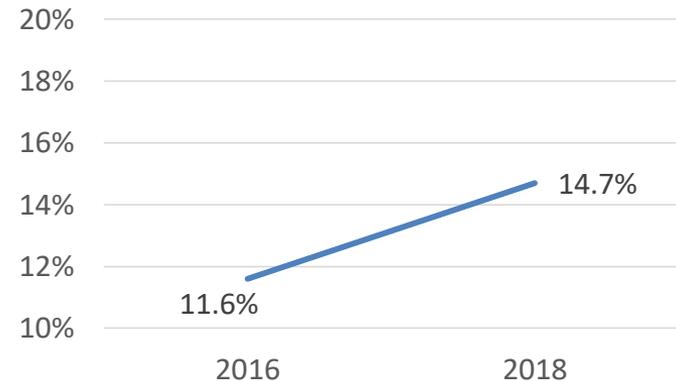
\*Based on trend analysis using a logistic regression model controlling for sex, race/ethnicity, and grade,  $p < 0.05$ .

†Based on t-test analysis,  $p < 0.05$ .

### High School Students



### Middle School Students



Data Source: 2018 Youth Behavior Risk Survey, CDC

# MENTAL HEALTH AND SUICIDE PREVENTION

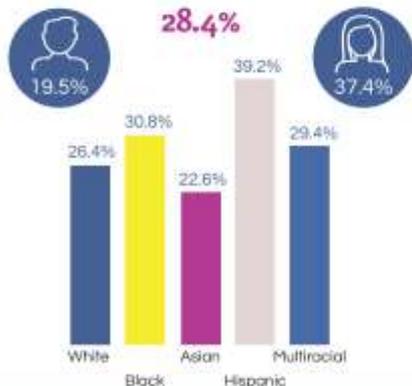
Howard County High Schools



**FACT:** Suicide was the leading cause of death for youth ages 15-19 in Howard County between 2014-2018.

Source: Maryland Vital Statistics Administration

**Hopelessness** Percent of high school students who felt sad or hopeless for 2 weeks or more



**Considered Attempting Suicide**

1 in 6 high school students seriously considered attempting suicide



According to national data, **40% of LGBTQ respondents** seriously considered attempting suicide in the past twelve months, with more than half of transgender and nonbinary youth having seriously considered suicide

Source: *The Trevor Project National Survey*

## What Can We Do?

### STRENGTHEN PROTECTIVE FACTORS

**Protective factors** are individual or environmental characteristics, conditions, or behaviors that reduce the effects of stressful life events. These factors increase an individual's ability to thrive in all aspects of life.



4 in 5 Howard County high school students would feel comfortable seeking help from one or more adults besides their parents if they had an important question affecting their life. Seeking help is a protective factor.



## Suicide is PREVENTABLE!

How You Can Get Help:



Talk with your pediatrician

[www.howardcountymd.gov/gethelp](http://www.howardcountymd.gov/gethelp)



Consult with a mental health professional

<https://www.hcrps.org/supports/mental-health-wellness/>



Talk with your school counselor



Connect with friends, family or a trusted adult

[www.teenhealthmatters.org](http://www.teenhealthmatters.org)

## Tips for Starting a Conversation About Suicide:

- Don't be afraid to ask if someone is having suicidal thoughts - asking about suicide will not put the thought in their head
- Ask open-ended questions instead of yes/no questions
- Check back in, and offer to connect them to help if they need it
- Don't pass judgement or offer advice - just listen

Source: *American Foundation for Suicide Prevention*



If you or someone you know are in crisis, contact the Grassroots Crisis Intervention 24-Hour Hotline



- Talk: 410-531-6677
- Visit: [www.grassrootscrisis.org](http://www.grassrootscrisis.org)



Text: HOME to 741-741 (Crisis Text Line)

Data Sources:  
- Maryland Vital Statistics Administration  
- 2018 Maryland Youth Risk Behavior Survey (the most recent student self-reported data available)  
- The Trevor Project National Survey

8930 Stanford Boulevard  
Columbia, MD 21045  
410-313-6300  
hchealth.org  
September 2020

# BACKGROUND & TIMELINE: HOWARD COUNTY YOUTH SUICIDE PREVENTION PLAN

---

- The Howard County Child Fatality Review Team became increasingly concerned by a rise in youth suicide fatalities over a five-year period (2012-2016).
- **April/May 2018:** Additional suicide deaths in 2017 prompted a review of local data and meetings with community partners.
- **June 2018:** A team of Health Department staff began research to develop a local plan.
- **July – December 2018:** Research, consult, revise, repeat...many drafts of the plan!
- **January 2019:** A multi-phased, long-term strategic Youth Suicide Prevention Plan (YSPP) was finalized.
- **February 2019:** The “*It’s OK to Ask*” awareness campaign was launched in the community as one of the components of the YSPP.

# LAUNCH – FEBRUARY 28, 2019



# GOALS OF THE PLAN

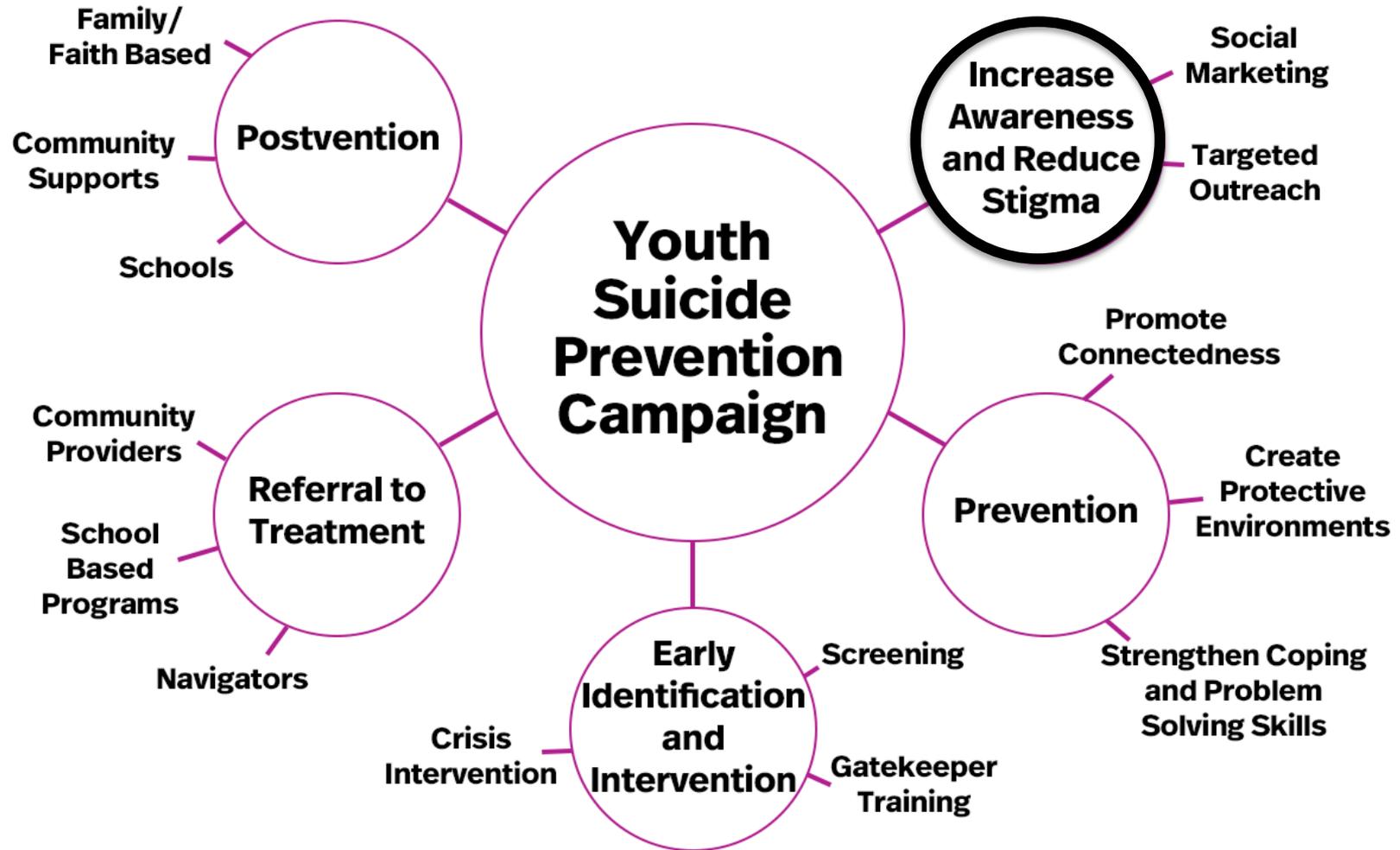
---

1. Reduce suicide *deaths* among Howard County youth.
2. Reduce suicide *attempts* among Howard County youth.

HCHD will utilize comprehensive and coordinated strategies to:

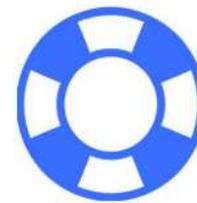
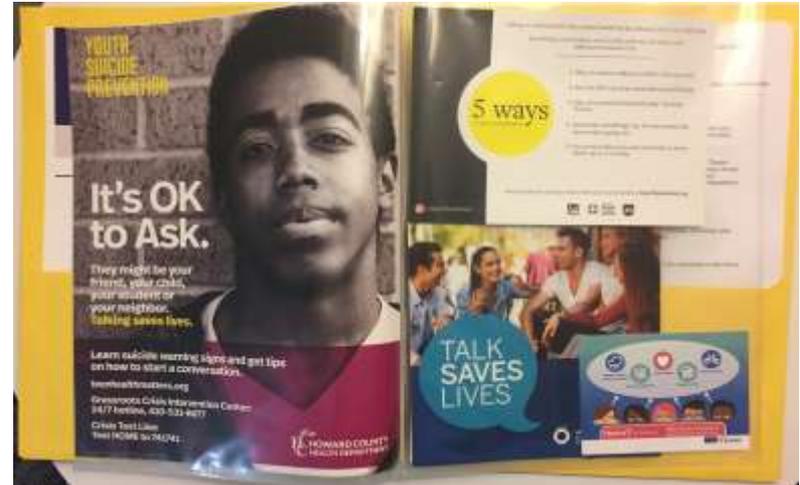
- **Increase awareness** of youth suicide
- **Decrease stigma** associated with talking about mental illness and suicide
- **Promote connectedness** and cultivate protective environments for youth
- Foster **early identification** and **referral** to care
- **Decrease barriers** affecting access to treatment
- **Support** those impacted directly by suicide and suicide attempts

# YOUTH SUICIDE PREVENTION MODEL



# 1. INCREASE AWARENESS & REDUCE STIGMA

- Marketing materials
- Educational seminars & trainings
- Youth Suicide Prevention toolkits
- Community presentations
- Website
- Targeted outreach with various populations



**American  
Foundation  
for Suicide  
Prevention**



**YOUTH  
SUICIDE  
PREVENTION**

**It's OK  
to Ask.**

They might be your  
friend, your child,  
your student or  
your neighbor.

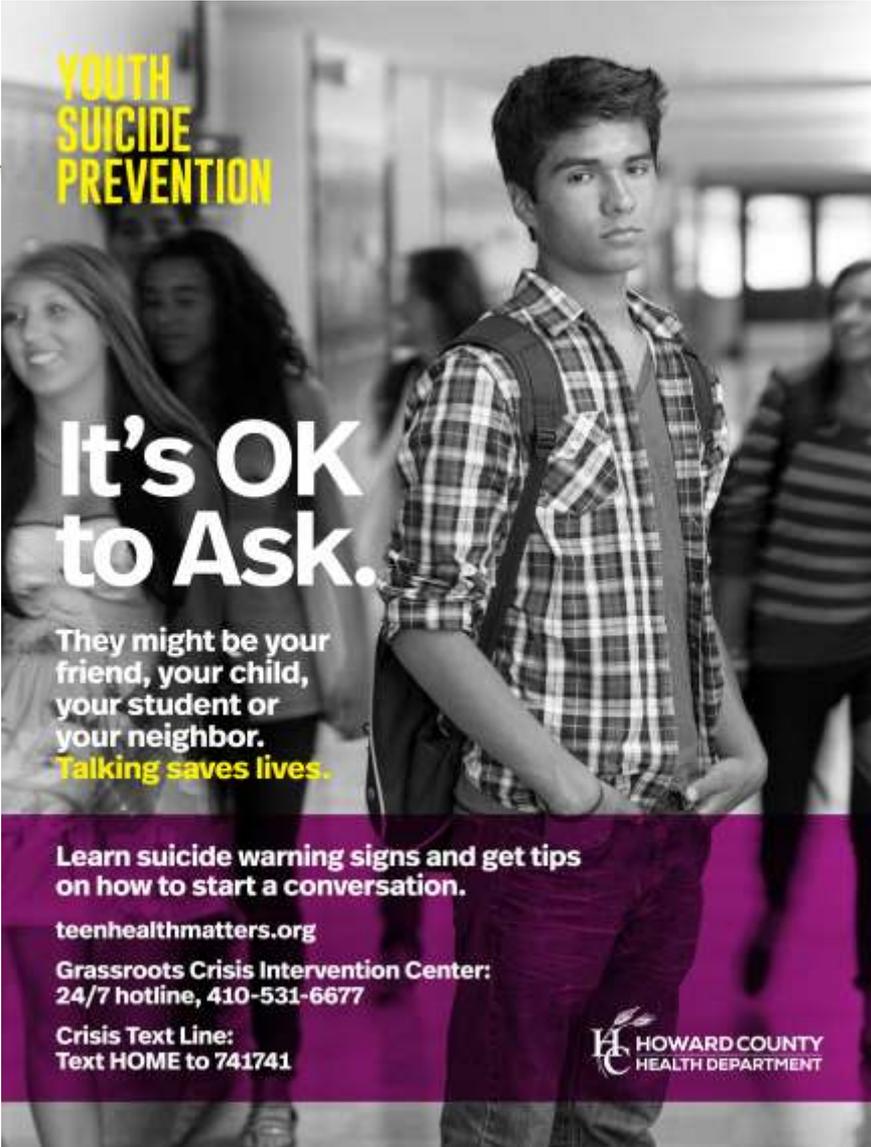
**Talking saves lives.**

Learn suicide warning signs and get tips  
on how to start a conversation.

[teenhealthmatters.org](http://teenhealthmatters.org)

Grassroots Crisis Intervention Center:  
24/7 hotline, 410-531-6677

Crisis Text Line:  
Text HOME to 741741



**YOUTH  
SUICIDE  
PREVENTION**

**It's OK  
to Ask.**

They might be your  
friend, your child,  
your student or  
your neighbor.

**Talking saves lives.**

Learn suicide warning signs and get tips  
on how to start a conversation.

[teenhealthmatters.org](http://teenhealthmatters.org)

Grassroots Crisis Intervention Center:  
24/7 hotline, 410-531-6677

Crisis Text Line:  
Text HOME to 741741



**YOUTH  
SUICIDE  
PREVENTION**

# It's OK to Ask.

They might be your  
friend, your child,  
your student or  
your neighbor.  
**Talking saves lives.**

Learn suicide warning signs and get tips  
on how to start a conversation.

[teenhealthmatters.org](http://teenhealthmatters.org)

Grassroots Crisis Intervention Center:  
24/7 hotline, 410-531-6677

Crisis Text Line:  
Text HOME to 741741



**YOUTH  
SUICIDE  
PREVENTION**

# It's OK to Ask.

They might be your  
friend, your child,  
your student or  
your neighbor.  
**Talking saves lives.**

Learn suicide warning signs and get tips  
on how to start a conversation.

[teenhealthmatters.org](http://teenhealthmatters.org)

Grassroots Crisis Intervention Center:  
24/7 hotline, 410-531-6677

Crisis Text Line:  
Text HOME to 741741



**YOUTH  
SUICIDE  
PREVENTION**

# It's OK to Ask.

They might be your  
friend, your child,  
your student or  
your neighbor.  
**Talking saves lives.**

Learn suicide warning signs and get tips  
on how to start a conversation.

[teenhealthmatters.org](http://teenhealthmatters.org)

Grassroots Crisis Intervention Center:  
24/7 hotline, 410-531-6677

Crisis Text Line:  
Text HOME to 741741



# TEEN HEALTH MATTERS

teenhealthmatters.org

If you are in a crisis, please call the Grassroots Crisis Hotline at 410-531-8677, or contact the Crisis Text Line by texting HOME to 741 741.

TEEN HEALTH *matters*

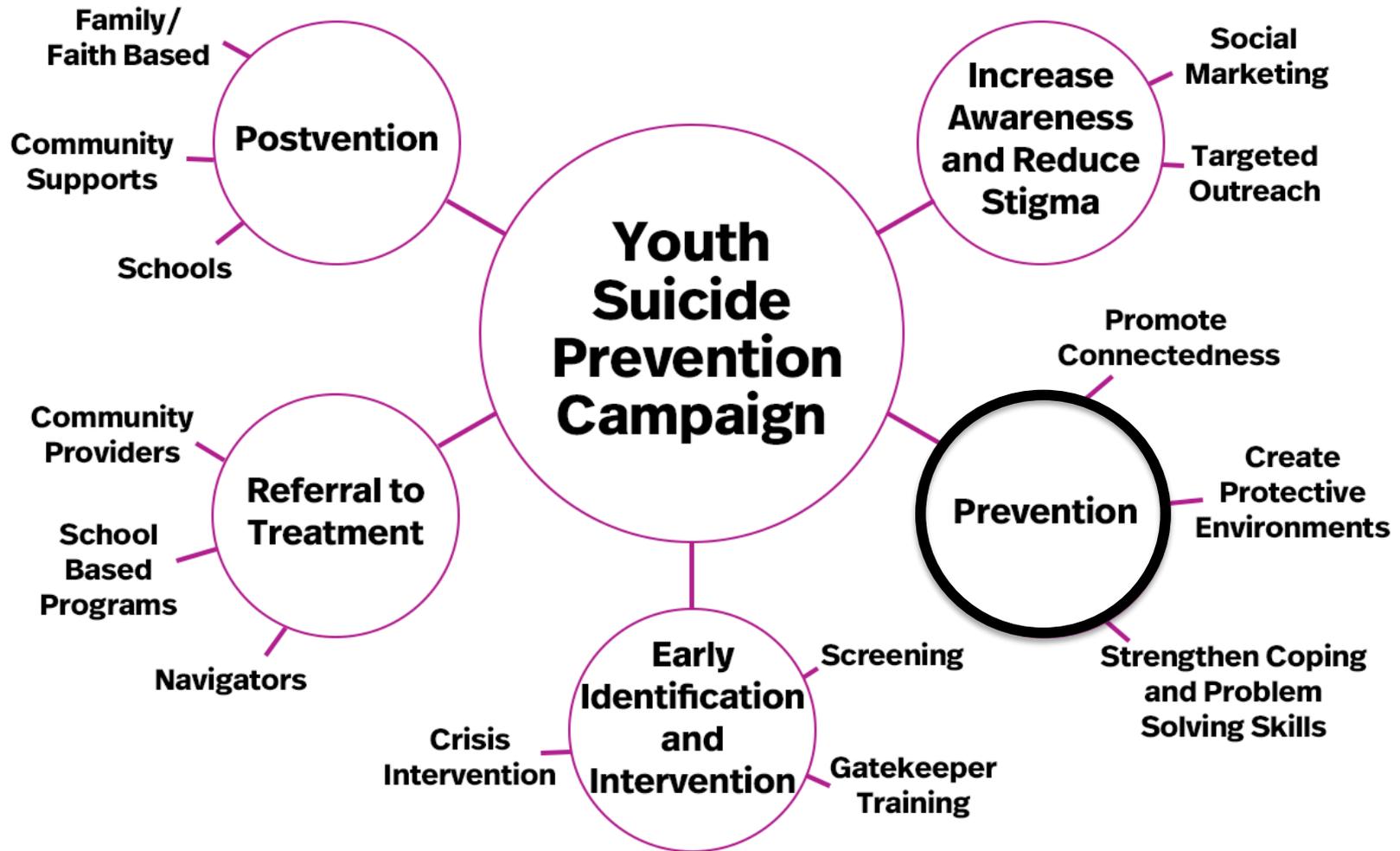
HOME ABOUT KNOW WHERE TO GO SOURCES OF STRENGTH BLOG MEDIA GET INVOLVED CONTACT US

## THE FUTURE gets brighter when you have a plan

Learn More

- MENTAL HEALTH & SUICIDE PREVENTION
- STRESS MANAGEMENT
- SEXUAL HEALTH
- DRUGS, ALCOHOL & VAPING
- PHYSICAL HEALTH

# YOUTH SUICIDE PREVENTION MODEL



## 2. PREVENTION – SOURCES OF STRENGTH

---



- Evidence-based Peer Leadership program
- Share Hope, Help, & Strength-based messages
- Increase help-seeking behaviors & promote connections with adult mentors
- Decrease bullying, substance use, & suicidal behaviors

# SOURCES OF STRENGTH WHEEL

---

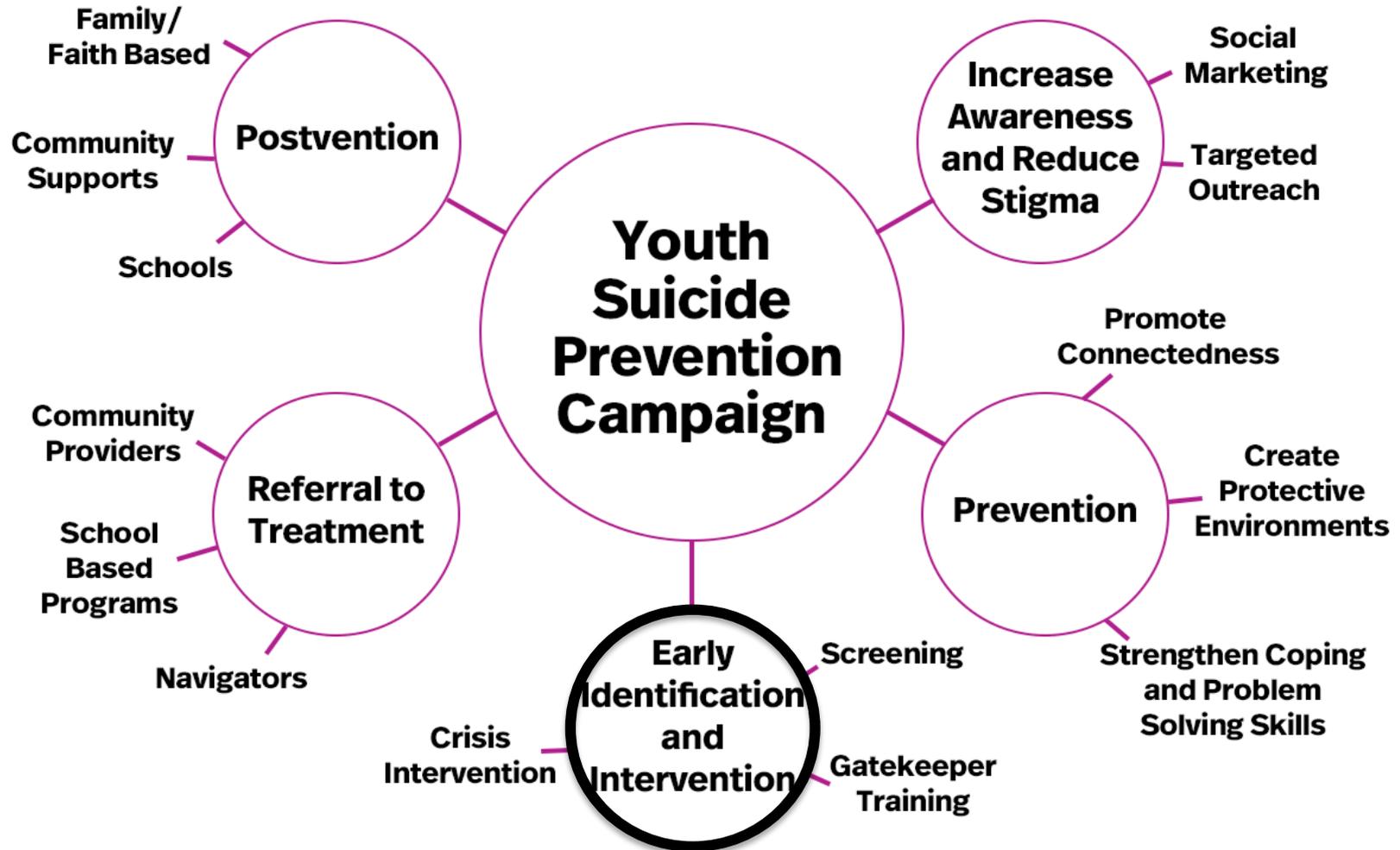


# WE ARE HOCO STRENGTH

---



# YOUTH SUICIDE PREVENTION MODEL



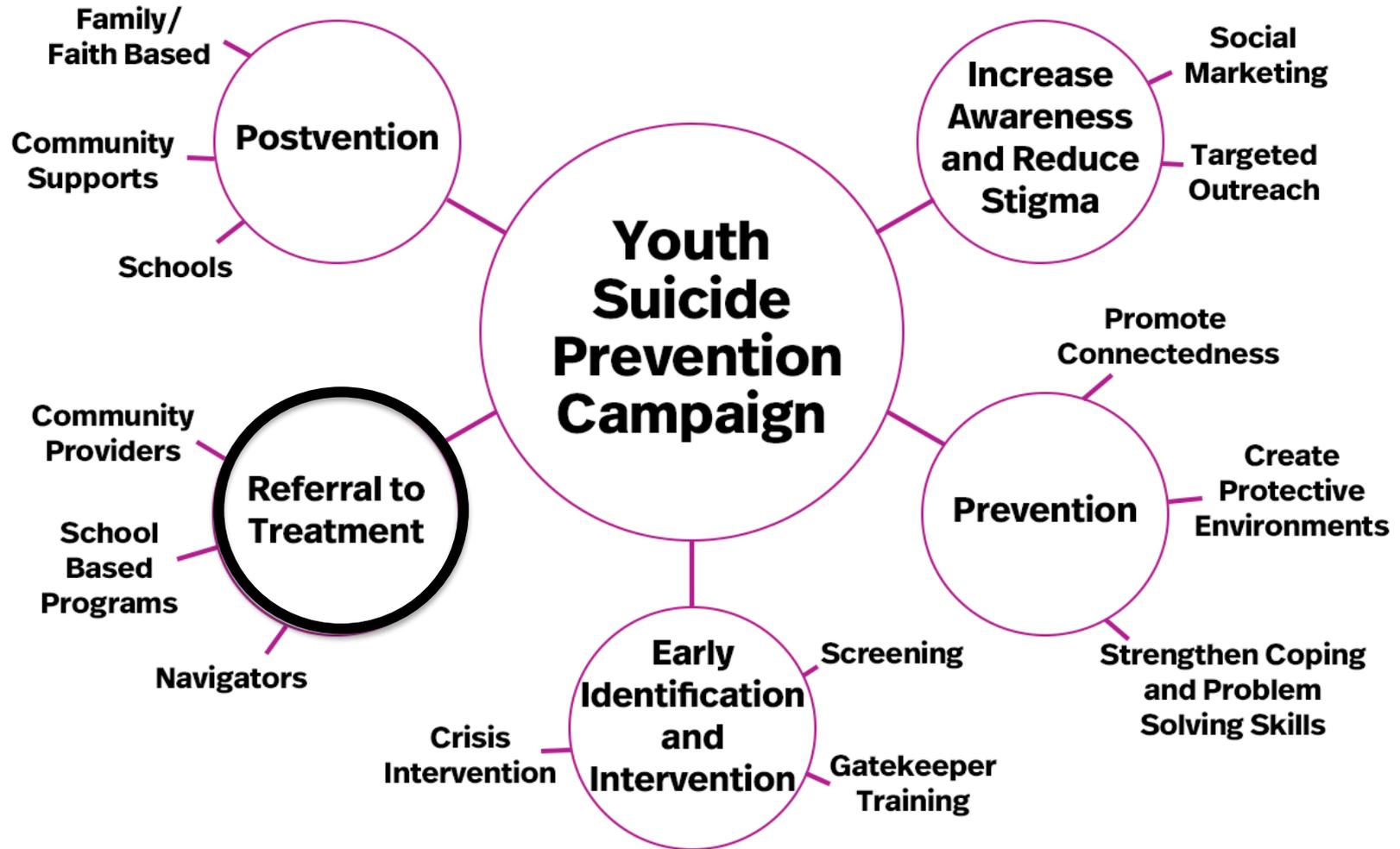
# GATEKEEPER TRAININGS

Training	Description	Intended Audience	Length	Sponsoring Agency
<b>ASIST (Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training)</b>	Teaches how to intervene and save a life from suicide. Over a million people around the world have participated in this award-winning program. Most people thinking about suicide don't actually want to die, but they need help deciding to stay alive. You don't need any prior training to attend ASIST—just a willingness to make a difference.	Although ASIST is widely used by healthcare providers, participants don't need any formal training to attend the workshop—anyone 16 or older can learn and use the ASIST model.	2 days	Grassroots Crisis Intervention
<b>Mental Health First Aid</b>	Teaches you how to identify, understand and respond to signs of mental illnesses and substance use disorders. The training gives you the skills you need to reach out and provide initial help and support to someone who may be developing a mental health or substance use problem or experiencing a crisis.	Open to residents of Howard County over 18 years of age. This class is a community course and is not recommended for mental health professionals.	8 hours	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Grassroots Crisis Intervention</li> <li>- Howard County General Hospital</li> <li>- American Foundation for Suicide Prevention (AFSP)</li> </ul>
<b>Safe Space Training</b>	Suicide prevention and intervention model that focuses on the LGBTQ+ population and their increased risk for suicide. It is free for Howard County residents and those who work in the county. CEUs are available. The training program combines cultural competence with prevention and intervention strategies to reduce stigma, reduce suicidality, and ultimately save lives.	County residents & employees	2-hour or 4-hour format	Grassroots Crisis Intervention

# GATEKEEPER TRAININGS

<b>SafeTALK</b>	Alertness training that prepares anyone (ages 15+) regardless of prior experience or training, to become a suicide-alert helper. Most people with thoughts of suicide don't truly want to die, but are struggling with the pain in their lives. Through their words and actions, they invite help to stay alive. SafeTALK-trained helpers can recognize these invitations and take action by connecting them with life-saving intervention resources, such as caregivers trained in ASIST.	Ages 15+	3 hours	American Foundation for Suicide Prevention (AFSP)
<b>Talk Saves Lives™: An Introduction to Suicide Prevention</b>	Covers the general scope of suicide, the research on prevention, and what people can do to fight suicide. Attendees will learn the risk and warning signs of suicide, and how together, we can help prevent it.	Community Members	60-90 minutes	American Foundation for Suicide Prevention (AFSP)
<b>QPR: Suicide Prevention Training</b>	Question, Persuade, and Refer (QPR) — 3 simple steps that anyone can learn to help save a life from suicide. Just as people trained in CPR help save thousands of lives each year, people trained in QPR learn how to recognize the warning signs of a suicide crisis and how to question, persuade, and refer someone to help.	Designed for individuals who do not have training/experience in suicide intervention.	1-2 hours	Grassroots Crisis Intervention
<b>Youth Mental Health First Aid</b>	This one-day training will equip you with resources and tools to learn the signs and symptoms of a mental illness or crisis, follow a five-step action plan to offer initial help and connect youth with appropriate care.	Open to all & is for anyone wanting to help another person, particularly in the youth ages 12-18	8 hours	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Grassroots Crisis Intervention</li> <li>- Howard County General Hospital</li> <li>- American Foundation for Suicide Prevention (AFSP)</li> </ul>

# YOUTH SUICIDE PREVENTION MODEL



# REFERRAL TO TREATMENT

---

- **Navigators**

- Behavioral Health Navigators: HCHD, HCGH, Grassroots
- Maryland Coalition of Families
- CARE Line (Office of Children & Families)
- Department of Community Resources & Services (DCRS)

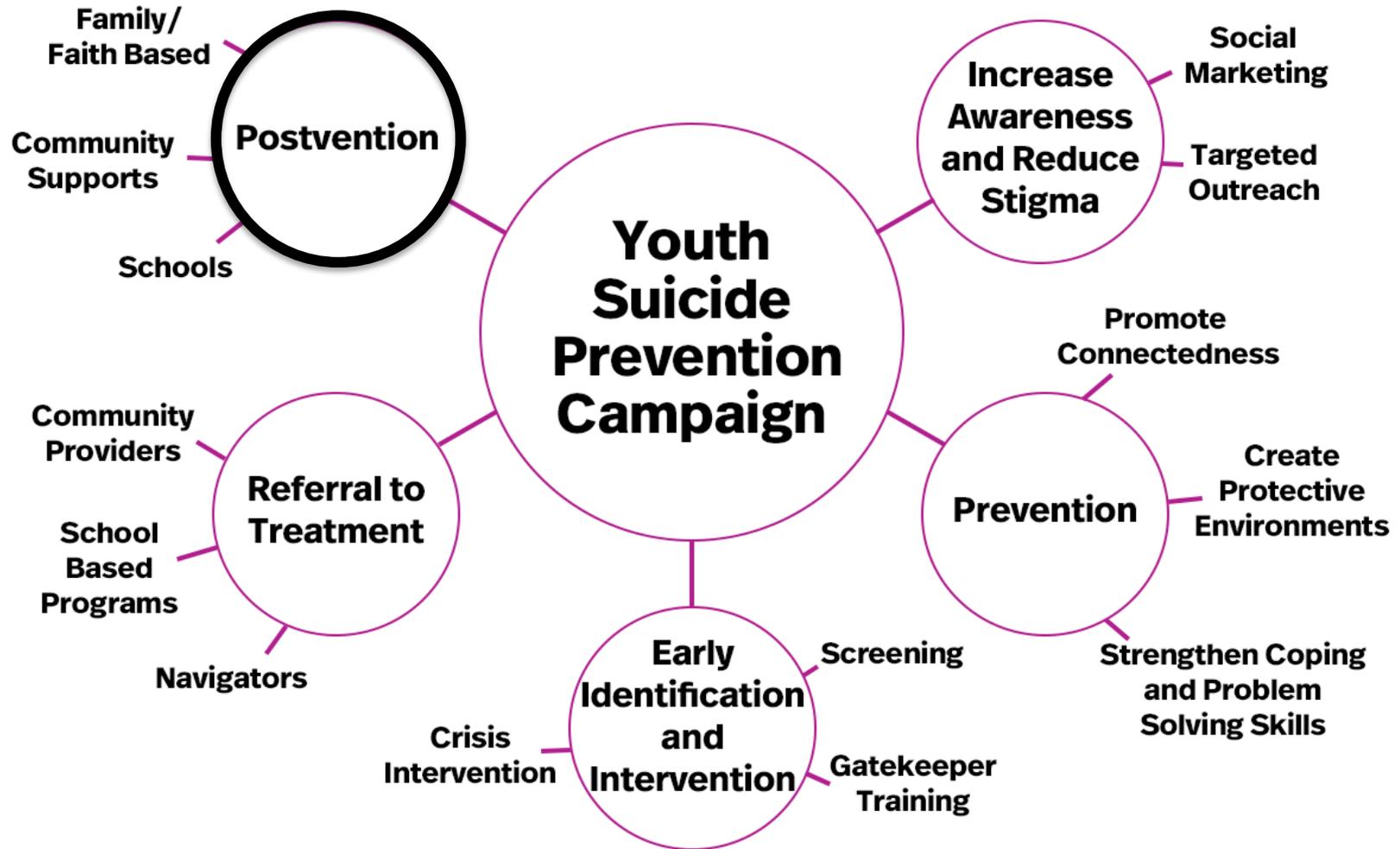
- **School-Based Programs**

- Student Support Services Team (SST)
- School counselors & psychologists
- Suicide Intervention Procedure (SIP)
- Mental Health Community Action Council (MHCAC)

- **Community Providers**

- Network via meetings & on-site visits
- Materials in provider offices

# YOUTH SUICIDE PREVENTION MODEL



# POSTVENTION

---

- **Community Supports**
  - Grassroots Crisis Intervention Center
  - Behavioral health providers
  - AFSP Healing Conversations
- **Faith-Based Community**
  - Promote healing
  - Engage in supportive community
- **Schools**
  - Promote supports within the schools



# EVALUATION AND MONITORING

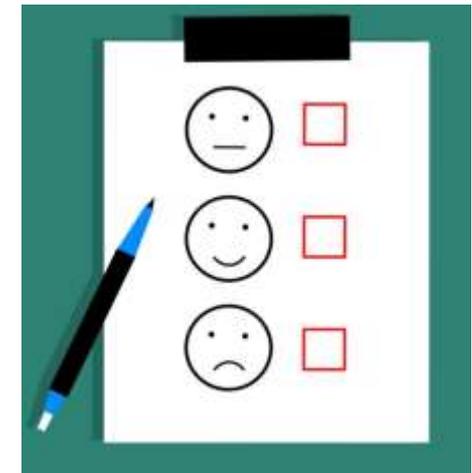
---

- **Data points to monitor include:**

- Reduced suicide rates
- Reduction in suicide-related YRBS data trends
- Increased participation in Screening, Gatekeeper Trainings

- **Data sources may include:**

- Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS)
- Suicide Intervention Procedures (SIP)
- Maryland Vital Statistics
- *Sources of Strength*, pre- and post-surveys
- YSPP social media awareness surveys



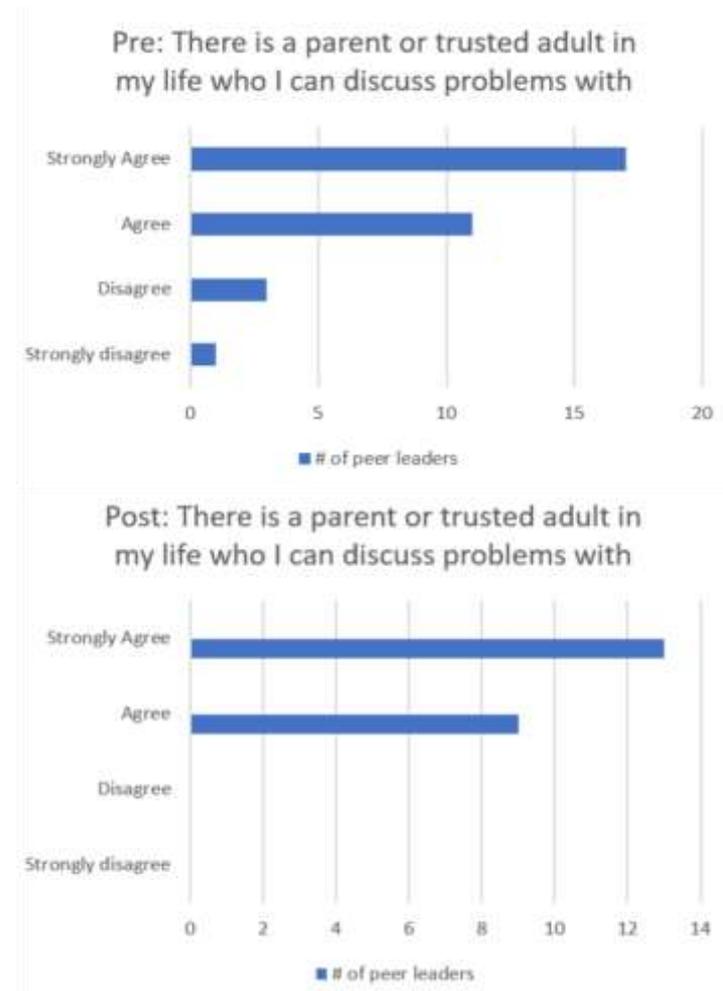
# YEAR ONE ACTIVITY SUMMARY

YSPSP Activity, Year 1 (2/28/19 – 2/29/20)	Number of Occurrences	Number of Participants
Outreach Events	20	N/A
Community Meetings	22	N/A
<i>It's OK to Ask</i> Presentations/Workshops	26	N/A
Training: Talk Saves Lives: An Introduction to Suicide Prevention(American Foundation for Suicide Prevention presentation)	9	158
Training: SafeTALK(American Foundation for Suicide Prevention)	1	8
SOS meetings (Monthly peer leader meeting, attendance varies)	7	15-40 per month



# SOS SATISFACTION PRE- & POST-SURVEYS

- 100% agreed or strongly agreed with statement, “I am comfortable talking to a peer about mental health” (increase of 3.2% from 96.8%)
- 95% agreed or strongly agreed with statement, “I feel that I can help a peer connect with or seek help from a trusted adult” (slight increase of 1.3%)
- 100% agreed or strongly agreed with statement, “There is a parent or trusted adult in my life who I can discuss problems with” (increase of 12.5% from 87.5%, see graphics at right)



# SOS SATISFACTION SURVEY – STUDENT RESPONSES

---

- What was the greatest strength of the program?
  - “The greatest strength was the strong sense of community felt at every program meeting. It was a space free of judgment which I believe is very important.”
  - “Everyone was really accepting of each other and it was easy to make friends and get along with both the peer leaders and the adult advisors. This is very important, especially in SOS, because that sense of unity we had is what helped us become a strong group advocating for mental health.”
  - “Just being able to connect with others and hear from other schools.”
  - “Unity in wanting to gain awareness of mental health in schools and bringing lack of awareness to light.”



## WHERE CAN YOU FIND RESOURCES?

---

- Talk to a counselor or trusted adult
- **State Crisis Hotline:** 2-1-1, press 1; or text your zip code to 898-211
- **Grassroots Crisis Hotline:** 410-531-6677
- **National Suicide Prevention Lifeline:** 1-800-273-TALK (8255)
- **Crisis Text Line:** text 741 741
- TeenHealthMatters.org for more information



# PROGRAM PILOT YEAR: OVERVIEW

---



**SOURCES  
OF STRENGTH**





# SOURCES OF STRENGTH PANEL DISCUSSION

---

# QUESTIONS?

---

Questions? Comments?

**Leah Bulka, LMSW**

Youth Suicide Prevention Coordinator

[lbulka@howardcountymd.gov](mailto:lbulka@howardcountymd.gov), 410-313-6240

**Colleen Nester, LCSW-C**

Youth & Family Support Services Supervisor

[cnester@howardcountymd.gov](mailto:cnester@howardcountymd.gov), 410-313-0613

THANK YOU!